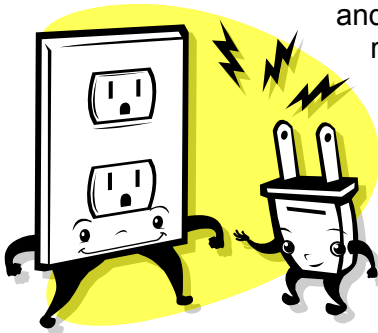




HEALTH CARE AGENCY/PUBLIC HEALTH ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH *INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN*

Food Safety During Power Outages in Food Establishments

A power outage can strike a retail food facility at any time, last for unknown durations and affect small or large areas. Knowing how to respond to it can make the difference between keeping your customers safe, happy, and healthy, and causing a foodborne illness outbreak. The physical hazards of running a retail food operation with no power are obvious. If there are no lights, accidents involving staff and/or customers are much more likely. It's the less obvious food safety hazards, however, that can pose an even greater risk. It's not always apparent how long a power outage will last, so it is always best to prepare for and react to a power outage as though it could last for several hours. Environmental Health wants your business to re-open as soon as possible, but not until it is safe for you, your staff, and the general public to do so.



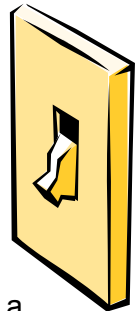
When the Power Goes Off, It Is Time To Power Down

1. Immediately Discontinue any Food Preparation and Service



Once you have lost power, you have lost the ability to safely control the temperature of potentially hazardous foods. In addition, you have lost the use of any electric appliances such as a water heater or dish machine. Compound this with the fact that there is no longer adequate lighting in the facility and you no longer have an environment in which it is safe to prepare and serve food. Allow any customers that are currently eating their meals to finish, but do not seat or serve any additional customers. Be sure to

make a note as to the time the power outage began so that you know how long your refrigerators and freezers have been without power.



2. Keep Cold Foods Cold and Hot Foods Hot

Your goal at this point is to do everything you can to keep all of your potentially hazardous foods, those foods such as high protein foods (meat, eggs, dairy) and cooked vegetables and starches, out of the danger zone (41°F – 135°F).



Food in refrigerators should be safe as long as the power is out no more than four hours. Leave the door closed; every time you open it, needed cold air escapes, causing the foods inside to reach unsafe temperatures. Use ice or/ice baths to rapidly cool small batches of hot food.

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Leave the freezer door closed. A full freezer should keep food safe about two days – a half-full freezer, about one day. Add bags of ice or dry ice to the freezer if it appears the power will be off for an extended time. You can safely re-freeze thawed foods that still contain ice crystals and are 41° F or less. **Caution:** *the use of dry ice may result in the unsafe build-up of carbon dioxide in a confined space leading to you or your staff to pass out due to a lack of breathable oxygen.*

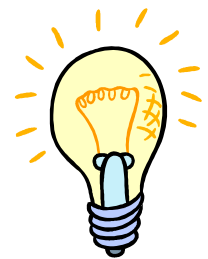
Do not place hot food in refrigerators or freezers, as this will rapidly raise the temperature inside the refrigerator or freezer and may make more food unusable.

Maintain hot potentially hazardous food at 135° F or above. Food that has reached final cooking temperature may be kept hot (135° F) by use of canned heat in chaffing dishes. Discard food products that are in the process of being cooked, but which have not yet reached the final cooking temperature.

Moving refrigerated food to a walk-in freezer, or obtaining a refrigerated truck are other options to keep food safe. Food should not be transferred to private homes.

3. **When Power is Restored**

Check the internal food temperatures using a food thermometer and record the temperature. Make sure to note how long the food has been out of temperature control. If practical, separate packages of food in refrigeration units and freezers to allow for faster re-cooling.



4. **When in Doubt, Throw it Out**

Discard any potentially hazardous food that has been above 41° F for four hours or more, reached a temperature of 50° F or higher for any length of time, or has an unusual color, odor, or texture.

Examples of potentially hazardous foods include:

- Meat, poultry, fish, eggs and egg substitutes
- Milk, cream and soft cheese
- Casseroles, stews or soups
- Lunch meats and hot dogs
- Cream-based foods made on-site
- Custard, chiffon, pumpkin or cheese pies
- Cream-filled pastries
- Cut Melons
- Cooked fruits and vegetables

Foods that are non-potentially hazardous that you can save include:

- Butter or margarine
- Hard and processed cheeses
- Fresh uncut fruits and vegetables
- Dried fruits and coconut
- Fruit juices
- Fresh herbs and spices
- Fruit pies, breads, rolls, and muffins
- Cakes, except cream cheese frosted or cream-filled
- Flour and nuts